

*Newsletter Material for Healthcare Professional Use*

**NATIONAL FAMILY HISTORY DAY**

***“My Family Health Portrait”***

Soon, all health care providers, regardless of specialty area, role, or practice setting, will face questions about implications of genetics for their patients. Common diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer are due to the interaction of genetic and non-genetic risk factors. Recognizing genetic factors that contribute to common diseases can help identify individuals with increased risk.

Family health history collection and interpretation is the most practical personalized genomic tool available. It represents complex interactions of genetic, environmental, cultural, and behavioral factors shared by family members. Health care professionals can use family health history information to design individualized care that integrates disease prevention and health promotion.

It is important that individuals are knowledgeable about their own family health history, and that they have a convenient way to share this information with their health care professionals. Recent polls indicate that the vast majority of people believe that family history information is important to their health, but that most people have never attempted to gather such information. To help with this, the Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS is launching ***The U.S. Surgeon General’s Family History Initiative***.

Several offices and agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including the Office of the Surgeon General, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality — as well as other organizations are coordinating efforts to increase America’s awareness of the importance of family health history.

Our goal is to provide accessible methods for easily obtaining an accurate family health history and to increase use of the family health history in disease prevention and health promotion. Together, we are teaming up to make Thanksgiving Day the annual National Family History Day. Thanksgiving Day 2004 will serve as the inaugural National Family History Day.

The Surgeon General’s Family History Initiative encourages discussion of health history at family gatherings to increase awareness and documentation of family history. The initiative includes an easy-to-use, downloadable, web-based family history tool, “My Family Health Portrait,” which will be available November 8 at <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>. This tool will also be available in print and in English and Spanish.

We encourage you to join this initiative, to be informed about the importance of considering family history in caring for your patients, and to consider personal and professional efforts that you can contribute, now or in future years, to assure the success of National Family History Day.

The future health of all can be improved through partnering to make a difference in knowledge gathering and utilization of family health history in disease prevention and health promotion. Learn more about available resources by visiting <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>.